

4. Easter Prayer Book from Kloster Medingen, 1478

The Easter Prayer Book was written in 1478 by the nun Winheid (von Winsen?) in the Cistercian Abbey of Medingen, one of the Lüneburg convents which still exist today as Protestant female religious communities. The prayer book is a compilation and adaptation of the liturgy, hymns, older prayers, and vernacular poems. There was a tradition of compiling these prayer books at least since the late 14th century as a devotional exercise by nuns in the convent and also adding musical notation and illuminating the text with marginal illustrations. This copy is particularly elaborate and seems to have been written in preparation for a reform of the convent which took place in 1479 and led to an intensification of the devotional manuscript production. The manuscript is digitised here, as are many of the prayer books from the convent. Full information and bibliography on the blog medingen.seh.ox.ac.uk. The sigla of this manuscript, Dombibliothek Hildesheim Ms J 29 is [H11](#); other manuscripts I will discuss are K4, an Easter prayer book written by the Medingen nun Cecilia de Monte in 1408, and [O1](#), an Easter prayer book started probably before the reform but extensively edited, now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. I am currently working on a critical edition of the Hildesheim prayer book and both text and translation are taken from there.

Suggestions and corrections are most welcome!

Illustrations: The Hortulanus Scene and the Nuns

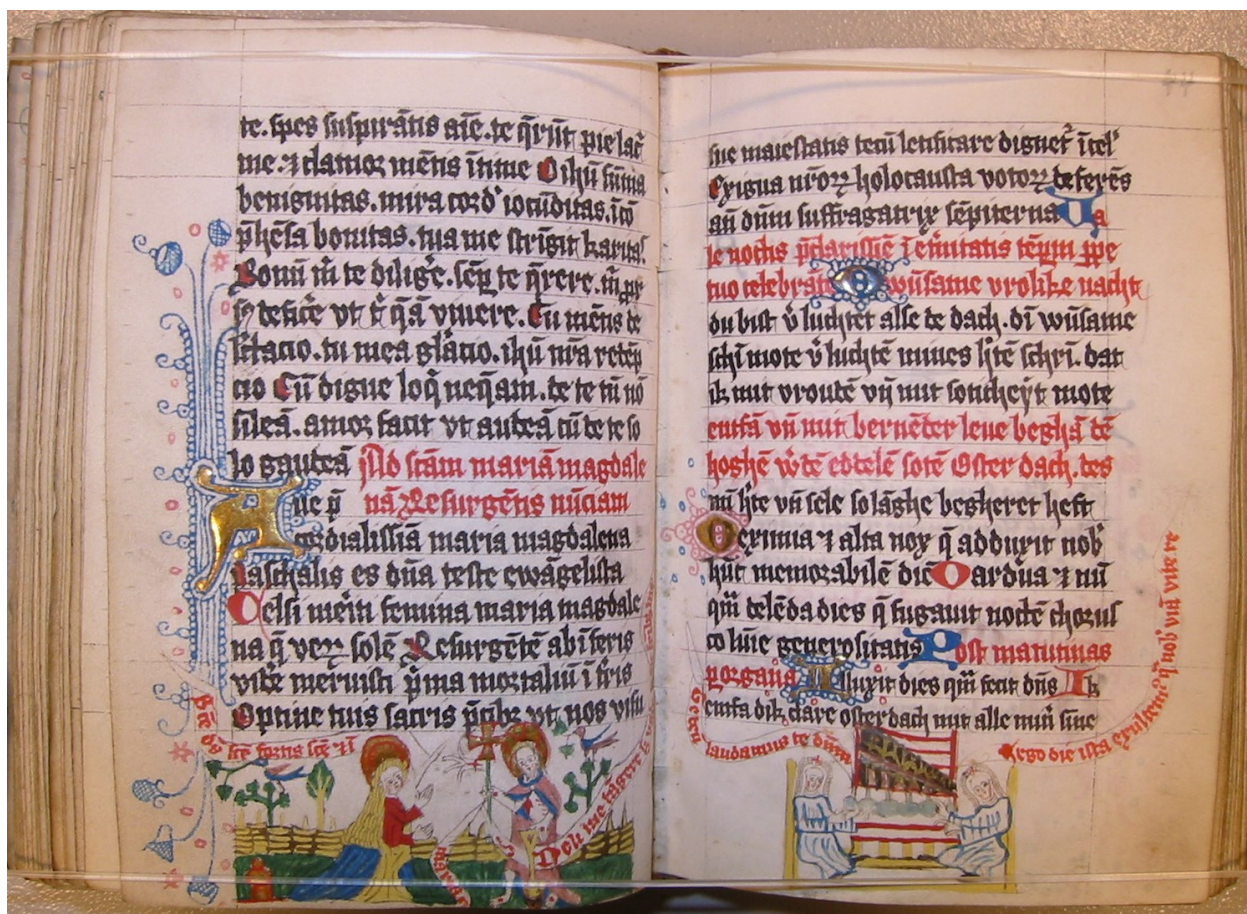


Fig. 3: Dombibliothek Hildesheim Ms J 29 ([H11](#)), fol. 43v: Mary Magdalene singing the 'Trishagion', Christ answering with the biblical address; fol. 44r: Nuns at the organ, singing 'Tedeum' and a verse from 'Laudes salvatori'



Dombibliothek Hildesheim Ms J 29 (H11),

fol. 103v: Angel: *Laudem dicite deo nostro omnes sancti eius et qui timetis deum. Rev 19:5*
 fol. 104r: Nun: *O mira circa nos tue pietatis dig[natio]. Christe O sponsa, ecce patet tibi ostium cordis mei, ut securum ad me habeas accessum.*

143v Communion Prayer with dialogue between Christus and his bride

Before accessing the communion table, the devotee should say a prayer asking Christ not to be cast out from his face but by the power of the union with human nature to open the door of mercy and illuminate the heart with divine knowledge to make the devotee take sacrament with such devotion that she is united with him. There follows a dialogue between bridegroom and bride which consists of a medley of Easter antiphons which in turn are based on words by Jesus from the gospels and those of Mary Magdalen. When the bridegroom enters, the devotee is supposed to genuflect and address him with a combination of the *Advenisti* and the Trishagion which is extended to ask for mercy also for all friends and benefactors, living and dead. The dialogue concludes with a line from the hymn *Tu Christe nostrum gaudium* by the bride and the antiphon *Ecce ego vobiscum* as reassurance from the bridegroom. After the meal a prayer of thanksgiving in rhymed prose weaves together the language of biblical praise to ask to be drawn after Christ who is the lover of all believers to the court of heaven.

Antequam accedis ad mensam paschalis leticie, dic corde deuoto

Before you approach the table of Easter joy, say with a devout heart:

O vnicum desiderium cordis mei, rogo te, ne me propter peccata mea a facie (144r) tua proicias (Ps 50:13)', sed per illam vnionem, qua tu in Resurrectione tua humanam naturam tibi copulasti, suscipe me venientem ad te et mihi pulsanti ianuam misericordie tue aperi et illumina cor meum lumine diuine cognicionis tue', vt sacramentum corporis et sanguinis tui tali deuocione et desiderio valeam suscipere et ita tibi vniri vt numquam a te valeam separari, amen.

O only desire of my heart, I ask you, do not cast me away from your presence because of my sins, but by that union, by which you joined human nature to yourself in your Resurrection, receive me coming to you and open the door of your mercy to me who is knocking, and illuminate

my heart with the light of your divine knowledge, so that I may be able to receive the sacrament of your body and blood with such devotion and desire, and so unite myself to you that I may never be separated from you, amen.

Sponsus

Pax vobis, ego sum, nolite timere.

Videte manus meas et pedes meos, quia ego sum. (Antiphons based on Lc 24:39)

Bridegroom: Peace be with you, it is I, do not be afraid. See my hands and my feet, that it is I.

Sponsa

Ardens est cor meum;

desidero videre dominum meum. (Antiphon for Easter)

Bride: My heart is burning; I desire to see my Lord.

Tunc ad ingressum sponsi genicula te et saluta eum desiderantis et dic:

Aduenisti ihesu, rex desiderabilis et amabilis,
salua et esto mihi placabilis.

Sancte deus, sancte fortis, sancte et immortalis, miserere mei (Good Friday liturgy) et omnibus amicis et benefactoribus meis viuis et defunctis.

Tu esto nostrum gaudium. (Hymn verse)

Then at the entrance of the bridegroom, kneel and greet him with desire and say: You have come, Jesus, desirable and lovable king, hail and be gracious to me. Holy God, holy mighty one, holy and immortal one, have mercy on me and on all my friends and benefactors, living and deceased. You may be our joy.

Sponsus (144v)

Ecce, ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus. (Antiphon)

Bridegroom: Behold, I am with you all days.

Post perceptas delicias epulare dulciter cum sponso tuo et adora glorificata vulnera eius et gracias age, quod omnia opera sua, que pro salute nostra operatus est, tam laudabiliter consummauit in iubilo sue gaudiose Resurrectionis, et dic cum summo cordis desiderio:

After receiving the delights, feast sweetly with your bridegroom and adore his glorified wounds and give thanks, that he has so laudably completed all his works, which he worked for our salvation, in the joy of his glorious Resurrection, and say with the highest desire of your heart:

O ardens amator fidelium
cujus deliciae sunt esse cum filiis hominum,
gracias tibi refero ex toto corde et anima,
quia ad excellentis amoris singulare priuilegium'
tradidisti mihi corporis et sanguinis tui ve[ne]rabile sacramentum',
vt cibo quo viuit angelica dignitas',
sustent[ar]etur humana fragilitas',
et ascendens ad patrem nobis placatus',
maneres semper nobiscum',
per tam eximie dotis pignus nobis propiciaturus'.

Rogo te per tantem misericordie tue (145r) largitatem
et per sancte eucharistie quam sumpsi dignitatem,
vt cordibus omnium, qui te hodie sumpserunt, instilles karitatis tue suauitatem,
vt trahente nos gracia
tua viam mandatorum tuorum curramus,
donec ad celi regiam perueniamus',
vbi te in patris dextera regnantem feliciter contemplemur, amen.

O ardent lover of the faithful, whose delight is to be with the children of men, I give you thanks with all my heart and soul, because you have given me the venerable sacrament of your body and blood as a singular privilege of excellent love, so that by the food by which the angelic dignity lives, human frailty might be sustained, and ascending to the Father, you remain always with us, to be propitious to us by the pledge of such an excellent gift. I beseech you by the greatness of your mercy and by the dignity of the holy Eucharist which I have received, that you instil the sweetness of your love into the hearts of all who have received you today, so that, drawn by your grace, we may run the way of your commandments (Conflation of Ct 1:3 *Trahe me, post te curremus in odorem unguentorum tuorum* and Ps 118:32 *Viam mandatorum tuorum cucurri, cum dilatasti cor meum.*), until we reach the royal palace of heaven, where we may happily contemplate you reigning at the right hand of the Father, amen.

188r Taking Leave of the Eastertide

After Compline, an extensive set of prayers for valediction offers thanks to the day for an insight into the future joy of heaven: After the introductory section, there follow prayers to the angels (189r), to the Apostles (190r), to St Maurice (190r), to Anna and Joachim as the holy parents (190v) and finally to Mary (191v). With the words of the disciples at Emmaus, Christ is asked to remain with the devotee who will like the bride of the Song of Songs and those who trust in God run with him without getting tired. Rhymed and sung variations of the valediction follow, with a line from a sequence confirming that life after death will be better. The devotee as "miserable sinful woman" (*misera peccatrix* 188v) asks in prayer to be forgiven for having been idle during Easter, to make her "participate in all goods of the whole Catholic church" (*fac me participem omnium bonorum totius ecclesie catholice* 189r) and nevertheless be allowed to participate after her life in the eternal jubilation year.

Post completorium vale preclarissime diei et dulcissimi ac amenissimi temporis.

After Compline, bid farewell to the most illustrious day and sweetest and most pleasant time.

Vale O dies', dies dierum, permanens in evum, qua saluabitur seculum.

Amor tuus et desiderium maneat in visceribus anime nostre'

et eterne diei beatitudinem nobis conferat.

Benedicta sis per secula, infinita desiderantissima et letissima dies,

et post anni curricula

illucesce nobis in leticia.

Farewell, O day, day of days, lasting forever, by which the world will be saved. May your love and desire remain in the depths of our soul and grant us the blessedness of the eternal day.

Blessed are you through the ages, infinite, most desired and happiest day, and after the course of the year, shine upon us in joy.

O dies deliciosa et auriflua',

tua dulcis memoria

numquam recedat a mea memoria!

O delightful and golden day, your sweet memory never departs from my memory!

O dies preclarissima et festiuitas letissima eternaliter per mansura', ecce nunc a nobis recedis temporaliter', magnum et graciosum nobis memoriale relinquis. Quapropter, o dulcissime ihesu, rogo te per gaudium tue deliciosissime Resurrectionis, vt non derelinquas nos, sed ma(188v)ne nobiscum, quoniam advesperascit et inclinata est iam dies', et cor nostrum accende in amore tuo et trahe me post te, curram et non deficiam'

(Amalgamation of Ct 1:3 *CHORUS ADOLESCENTULARUM. Trahe me, post te curremus in odorem unguentorum tuorum* and Is 40:31 *qui autem sperant in Domino mutabunt fortitudinem, assument pennas sicut aquilæ: current et non laborabunt, ambulabunt et non deficient.*), te trahente et me ducente in vitam eternam, amen.

O most illustrious day and happiest festivity, to last eternally, behold, now you depart from us temporarily, you leave us a great and gracious memorial. Therefore, O sweetest Jesus, I ask you by the joy of your most delightful Resurrection, that you do not abandon us, but stay with us,

for it is evening and the day is now far spent, and kindle our hearts in your love and draw me after you, I will run and not faint, you drawing and leading me into eternal life, amen.

O excellentissima dies cristi Resurrectionis,
vale dico tibi ex totis visceribus meis.

Vale amenissimum tempus Paschalis diei,
presignans nobis tempus eterni iubilei.

O iocundum tempus vernale, valeas,
et a mea memoria numquam recedas!
Vale vale valeas',
et post anni curricula letanter redeas, amen.

Post mortem melius
cum eo victurus. (Sequence *Agni paschalis*)

O most excellent day of Christ's Resurrection, I bid you farewell with all my heart. Farewell, most pleasant time of the Paschal day, foreshadowing for us the time of the eternal jubilee. O joyful springtime, farewell, and never depart from my memory! Farewell, farewell, farewell, and after the course of the year, return joyfully, amen. After death, to live better with him.

O dulcissime ihesu, gracias ago tibi ex toto corde, quod me indignam hoc desiderantissimo tempore cum omnibus cristianis tempus tue pijissime passionis et gloriosissime Resurrectionis celebrare concessisti cum sanitate et ad tuum sanctum seruicium confortasti, sed heu ego misera peccatrix velud arbor (189r) infructuosa inter alios steti' et sine fructu bonorum operum permansi', sed, o misericordissime ihesu, scio vere te tam benignum et misericordem, quod in hac amenissimo et florifero tempore Paschali neminem repellis a tua ineffabili misericordia et bonitate'; idcirco rogo te propter sacratissimam passionem et iocundissimam Resurreccionem tuam, vt ignoscas mihi, quod hoc vtrumque tempus sine deuocione tam invtiliter peregi', fac me participem omnium bonorum tocius ecclesie catholice, vt post hanc vitam possideam annum iubileum in eterna requie, quod figuratur hijs sacrís quinquaginta diebus'. Suscipe hanc celeberrimam sollempnitatem nostre festiuitatis et tue gloriosissime Resurrectionis et adiunge eam festis angelorum, vbi non annue, sed continue Pascha celebratur in sancte trinitatis presencia, amen.

O sweetest Jesus, I give thanks to you with all my heart, that you have granted me, unworthy, this most desired time with all Christians to celebrate the time of your most pious passion and most glorious Resurrection with health and have comforted me for your holy service, but alas, I, a wretched sinful woman, like a fruitless tree, stood among others and remained without the fruit of good works, but, O most merciful Jesus, I truly know you to be so kind and merciful, that in this most pleasant and flowery Paschal time you reject no one from your ineffable mercy and goodness; therefore, I ask you by your most sacred passion and most joyful Resurrection, that you forgive me, that I have spent this time so uselessly without devotion, make me a participant in all the good of the whole Catholic Church, that after this life I may possess the jubilee year in eternal rest, which is symbolized by these sacred fifty days. Receive this most celebrated solemnity of our festivity and your most glorious Resurrection and join it to the feasts of the angels, where not annually, but continuously, Easter is celebrated in the presence of the Holy Trinity, amen.